

# FILLING A LEAKY BUCKET?

## A New Look at the Teacher Shortage

Report from the UFT

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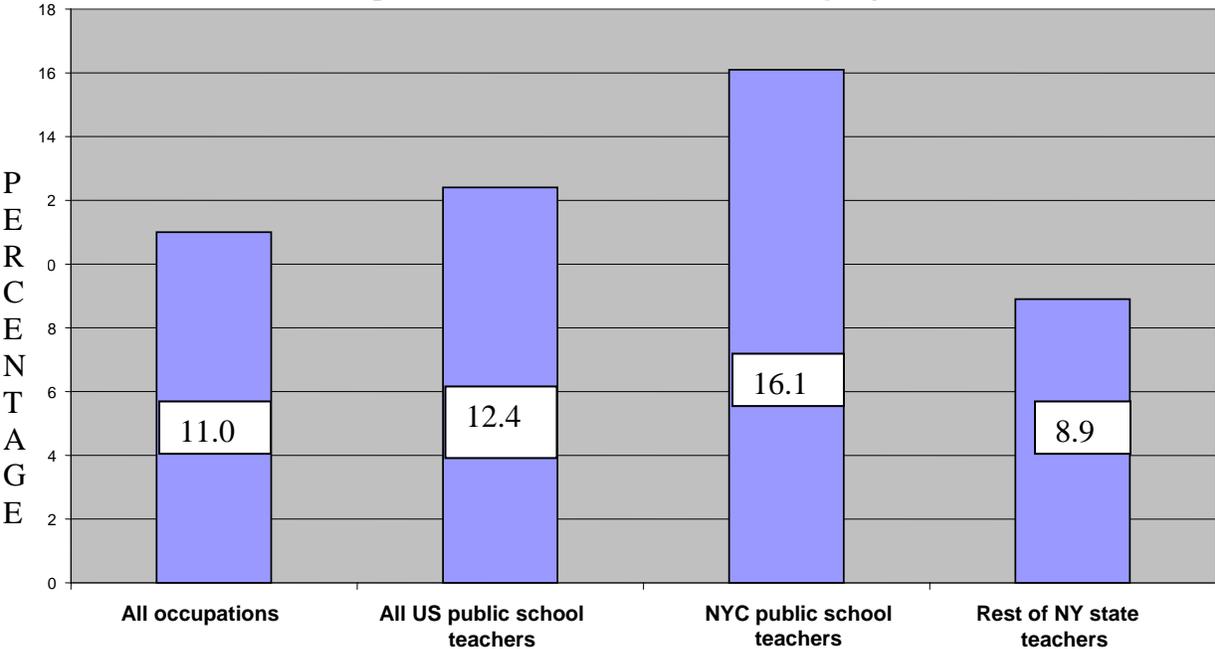
### Is the Teacher Shortage Over?

Concern about the teacher shortage has abated in the public mind. After a flurry of alarming reports a few years ago, recent studies claim the shortage is confined only to certain hard-to-staff school districts, or only to certain areas, such as math and science, or special education.

But in New York City, the teacher shortage is far from over. The city had to hire more than 9,000 new teachers for the current school year alone, the equivalent of 11.5 percent of its 78,000-member teaching force. In fact, the city has hired almost that many new teachers every year since 1997.

What's behind this? Not growing enrollment. In fact, enrollment has declined in each of the last four years and is projected to fall further. To some extent, reduced class sizes in the early grades have upped the demand for teachers. But the major reason the city must do such heavy hiring is that a huge number of teachers leave the city schools each year, far more than "normal" attrition rates (Figure 1). Some have likened staffing city schools to pouring water into a bucket full of holes.

**Figure 1: Annual turnover of employees**



Sources: Richard M. Ingersoll, "Teacher turnover, teacher shortages and the organization of schools," 2002; NY State Education Dept. data for 2001 by telephone.

## How We Got to This Point

The New York City school system has long suffered from a shortage of qualified teachers. Throughout the 1990s, the schools were staffed by more and more teachers allowed to serve on temporary licenses and provisional certificates, which often meant they had no preparation to teach at all. By 2000, more than 13,000 NYC teachers, or 17 percent of the teaching force, had not passed state teaching exams and/or did not have the college courses or student teaching hours required for teacher certification. In certain community school districts the rate was far higher, and State Education Dept. data show that in some shortage areas, like math, science, bilingual and special education, upwards of one-third of teachers did not meet certification requirements.

These unprepared teachers were given little or no extra help. Many did not receive even the required mentoring, or got professional development sessions irrelevant to their needs. They were expected to handle large classes that often included several special-needs students. At the same time, teachers were charged with bringing all students up to rising state and federal standards.

Not surprisingly, there has always been high turnover of uncertified teachers. In a February 2003 study of attrition, Fred Smith, a Board of Education consultant, reported that of all teachers hired in 2001, 23.5 percent of uncertifieds left in the first year, versus 14.6 percent of certified teachers.

In 2000, after years of warnings, the State Education Dept. put districts on notice that it intended to phase out use of uncertified teachers by September 2003. Though New York City won some limited extensions, the SED aim was clear. This was a mandate to upgrade the quality of teaching. Aware of the SED deadline, the Public Employee Relations Board in April 2002 recommended a 16-percent increase in teacher salaries in New York City, in part to recruit more certified teachers. The UFT and the city negotiated salary terms along those lines.

## The Recruitment Crisis Morphs into the Retention Crisis

The higher salaries helped. In fall 2002, after the new contract took effect, the proportion of uncertified teachers fell to 10 percent. The reduction in uncertified teachers was also helped by a costly “fast-track” alternative-certification program, started by the Board pursuant to an agreement with the SED in 2000. To date it has placed 5,800 alternatively-certified Teaching Fellows in the schools following a summer training program. The Board has also offered recruitment incentives, such as tuition reimbursement programs, designed to attract and retain certified staff in underperforming schools.

But the teacher shortage is far from solved. In fact, there has been no reduction in the number of teachers hired each year. What has changed, instead, is our understanding of the causes. A close look at staffing patterns shows that the shortage of qualified teachers is more a problem of retention than recruitment.

### Losing New Teachers

Nearly 19 percent of *first-year* teachers left the system during or immediately after the 2002-03 school year, and more than 21 percent left in each of the two years before that (Table 1). Second- and third-year teachers also leave in high numbers. These attrition rates rose precipitously between 1998 and 2002. During their first three years, more than forty percent of teachers hired in 2000-01 left the system. If present trends continue, well over half of new teachers hired can be expected to leave within their first five years.

**Table 1: Attrition of New Teachers, NYC 1998-2003**  
Cumulative Percentage of Teachers Who Quit

Yr. Hired	% quit year one	% quit year two	% quit year three	% quit year four	% quit year five
1998-99	15.6%	25.8%	33.8%	40.0%	46.1%
1999-00	17.4%	28.9%	35.9%	44.9%	
2000-01	21.3%	31.3%	42.6%		
2001-02	21.6%	36.3%			
2002-03	18.7%				

Source: BOE/DOE data, analyzed by UFT, revised Jan 2004.

For the Teaching Fellows, attrition rates have proved higher still. The three-year attrition rate for Fellows hired in 2000-01 is 51.9 percent, versus 42.6 percent for all new teachers hired that year, nearly a 10-percentage-point difference (Table 2). Fellows who started in the 2001-02 year had a two-year attrition of 41.4 percent, versus 36.3 percent for all new teachers.

**Table 2: NYC Teaching Fellows Attrition Rates**

<b>Cohort Start Date</b>	<b>Number Hired</b>	<b>Began Teaching</b>	<b>Returned Year 2</b>	<b>Returned Year 3</b>	<b>Returned Year 4</b>	
Cohort 1 Sept. 2000	349	323	256	209	171	<b>3 Year Attrition Rate</b> 51.9%
*Cohort 2 Jan. 2001	90	71	60	52	40	
Cohort 3 Sept. 2001	1230	1096	837	716	<b>2 Year Attrition Rate</b> 41.4%	
*Cohort 4 Jan. 2002	39	36	32	28		
Cohort 5 Sept. 2002	1925	1843	1557	<b>1 Year Attrition Rate: 19.1%</b>		
Cohort 6 Sept. 2003	2700	2440				

\* Mid year cohorts are counted as returning when they start teaching the next fall.

Source: Department of Education Office of Alternative Certification; additional information from earlier reports; calculations by UFT

### Losing Experienced Teachers

While new teachers have the highest rates of attrition, large numbers of experienced teachers also leave the city schools each year. For calendar year 2003, a total 6,444 teachers resigned or were terminated for various reasons, up from 5,699 the year before (Table 3). Of those resigning, 2,409 were certified teachers, up from 2,262 the previous year. If history is a guide, many of them were recruited by nearby suburban schools offering higher salaries, smaller classes, adequate resources, and a more professional working environment.

Retirements have also risen over the last three years, up by 40 percent last year alone. All in all, more than 13 percent of the teaching force left in calendar year 2003.

**Table 3: Teacher Terminations, Resignations  
and Retirements, 2001-2003**

	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	
Resignation of regulars	2,628	2,262	2,409	
Termination of substitutes	2,926	2,924	3,547	
Other departures	473	513	488	
<b>Total terminations/resigns</b>	<b>6,027</b>	<b>5,699</b>	<b>6,444</b>	
<b>Retirements</b>	<b>2,930</b>	<b>3,007</b>	<b>4,205</b>	
<b>Total departures</b>	<b>8,957</b>	<b>8,707</b>	<b>10,649</b>	
<b>As Percentage of All Teachers</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	

Source: Dept. of Education payroll data, analyzed by UFT. Does not include approved leaves.

### The Cost of Teacher Attrition

New teachers who leave the NYC school system early in their careers take with them the city's investment in their recruitment and professional development.

The cost of attrition of first-year teachers alone is about **\$21 million, or \$13,200 per teacher lost.**

From the Department of Education's figures, we know:

- In 2000-01 (latest figures available) the Board of Education spent \$43.5 million on advertising and recruitment. A year later, 21.3 percent of those newly-hired teachers left, a loss of \$9.3 million.
- Half of the current UFT contract's six-percent salary increase, or about \$1200 for a first-year teacher, goes toward extra time for professional development. With 18.7 percent of the 8,500 new teachers hired in 2002-03 quitting, the Department wrote off \$1.9 million.
- The cost for the New Teacher Staff Development program in 2002-03 was \$2.2 million. If 18.7 percent of that was lost to attrition after one year, the loss comes to \$411,000.
- The DOE reports the cost of training each Teaching Fellow is \$25,000. Nineteen percent of the 1,925 Fellows hired in 2002-03 left within one year, taking with them the Department's \$9.1-million investment. (The DOE cut the Fellows' Masters degree stipend this year.)

- For the 2002-03 year, 520 newly-hired teachers received \$3,400 each for working in SURR schools under the Teachers of Tomorrow program. If 18.7 percent left, the Department lost \$331,000 on them.

Totaling these brings the cost of new-teacher attrition to \$21 million. Spread evenly among 18.7 percent of the 8,500 new teachers who left in their first year means taxpayers are out \$13,200 for every new teacher who leaves.

There is another, even greater cost for veteran teacher attrition, one that is measured not in dollars but in lost value for students. Fully qualified teachers do not emerge fully formed from education schools, let alone alternative-certification programs. Studies have consistently shown that the ability to successfully manage a classroom of 25 or 35 children, teach to several different learning styles at once, or make an early and accurate diagnosis of reading problems are skills that come with time and experience. A revolving-door of teacher hiring and replacement precludes that kind of development.

### What Departing Teachers Say

National research on attrition has shown that, in addition to salaries, working conditions in schools are a major factor in teachers' decisions to leave. Univ. of Pennsylvania Prof. Richard M. Ingersoll, in a study of teacher turnover in the *American Educational Research Journal* (Fall 2000), said teachers cited poor administrative support (50%) and lack of influence in their schools (43%) just about as often as low salaries (51%) in their decisions to quit.

Brand-new teachers are typically more distressed by working conditions relative to salaries, because they know when they come in what their salaries will be and because they often have fewer family responsibilities. Recent studies of new teachers (and about half the NYC teaching force has five years or less experience) suggest that the major determinant of whether teachers stay or leave is their sense of success in the classroom. Teachers who feel unsafe, unsupported, who are unable to manage their classrooms, who feel isolated from colleagues or ignored by supervisors leave in large numbers.

Harvard University professor Susan Moore Johnson, writing in the Fall 2003 issue of the *American Educational Research Journal*, says discouraged first- and second-year teachers complain of "arbitrary, abusive or neglectful" principals, "inappropriate teaching assignments or excessive teaching loads" and "lack of curriculums and resources." She concludes:

*Pay and prestige figured into the decisions of some who left public school teaching, but for others, these were secondary irritants. Working conditions*

*loomed large, as teachers longed for the support and resources that would enable them to feel successful.*

In New York City, new teachers cite weak school discipline enforcement policies, concerns about student behavior and difficulties with classroom management as three factors that have a major influence their decisions to leave.

In a July 2003 report prepared for the Dept. of Education's Division of Human Resources, Fred Smith analyzed the results of an exit survey of city teachers hired in 2001 who left the city school system in their first year. He finds that when teachers are asked to rate the influence of various factors on their decision to leave:

- ❖ Disciplinary processes and procedures were considered extremely important by 46 percent of respondents, followed by student behavior (38%).
- ❖ On the next tier of impact were classroom management issues, availability of resources and class size (34% each).
- ❖ It wasn't that they quit teaching. Almost 60 percent of respondents left for jobs in other school systems.

Smith comments:

*While monetary matters contribute to the decision to leave, a desire for better working conditions is a greater consideration, even stronger for those who moved to a teaching job in a different system than for those whose next job was outside of education.*

In a more limited 2003 study of 75 Teaching Fellows who left the program, by the DOE's Center for Recruitment, 62 percent said they did not get the support they needed. Student discipline was another leading problem, cited by half the Fellows, followed closely by a burdensome workload and lack of adequate preparation and training, both at 46%.

An unpublished report on the NYC Teaching Fellows program by a Columbia University Teachers College doctoral student included revealing quotes from new teachers. One confessed to the author, "I walked into that classroom and I had no idea what to do." Another said she felt like a "glorified babysitter." A third told her, *...all it is, all day long, is discipline, discipline, discipline...I mean that's not what I expected. I expected there would actually be learning going on.*

## Conclusion

Most educators and researchers agree that skilled teaching is the single most important ingredient in student success. But in New York City, a leaky bucket,

filling and emptying with inexperienced teachers, makes it difficult build a solid corps of skilled staff. New teachers are not supported by any formal system of induction and professional development, and they enter schools that are often unsafe, disorganized and short of essential supplies. Finally, losing teachers is expensive, more expensive than recruiting and training them, once the full costs of attrition are tallied.

Teachers come into the New York City public schools wanting to make a difference. Instead, too many of them leave as quickly as they can. Addressing this alarming attrition rate with salary incentives, professional support and improved working conditions would greatly benefit the school system.